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ABSTRACT

This lesson plan features a classroom simulation that helps students understand a command economic system. The lesson plan states a purpose; gives student educational objectives; suggests a time duration for the activity; lists materials needed; and outlines a step-by-step teaching procedure. Instructions for a research and writing homework exercise are included. (BT)

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A Command Economic System
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By Kimberly Owens

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A Command Economic System

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Purpose:
Through participation in a simulation, students will learn about the Command Economic System, which is found in countries like the Former Soviet Union, North Korea, and China.

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- identify five characteristics unique to the Command Economy. Strategies and characteristics are listed below.
- compare and contrast the Command Economy with the Free Market Economic System.
- formulate how an individual's life would differ if he or she lived in a Command Economy as opposed to a Free Market Economic System.

Time:
The simulation and the debrief take approximately one class period of 55 minutes.

Materials:
- A variety of traditional Russian pieces
- A CD Player
- A Russian music CD
- Nametags
- Blank pieces of paper
- Unsharpened pencils
- Pencil sharpener
- Overhead notes on the focus topic of the Former Soviet Union
- Current article on "Life in Russia."

Procedure:
1. Today is one of the few classes that do not begin with a Bell-Ringer. Prior to class, the following are placed in the classroom: a variety of traditional Russian things, such as: photos and postcards, Rubles, Russian clothes, Communist pins and buttons, and "matroshka" (nesting dolls). Having spent a month living in Russia, I have access to all of these things. Additionally, Russian music will be

playing in the background and the desks will be in rows (which is unlike my normal classroom arrangement). Each desk will have a nametag sitting on it, with the students' name that is assigned to that seat written in Russian.

2. As soon as the previous class ends and five minutes before the Economics class begins, the classroom door will be locked and students will be required to stand in the hall until the door is opened. A tape recorder will be recording their reaction to the door being closed. A minute after the bell rings, the students will be asked to line up outside the door. Once they are in a neat orderly line, they will be permitted to enter the room and sit in their assigned seat as quickly and quietly as possible. The tape recorder will be brought inside to continue to record their reactions. The students will then be asked to put their books, pencils, and any other materials that they brought with them under their desks. I will tell them there is no need for their personal school supplies today, and that "everything that they will need today will be provided by the teacher, who represents the government."

3. Russian music will be playing quietly in the background and students will be welcomed into the command economy. I will greet them with a few Russian phrases, introducing myself and welcoming them to the Former Soviet Union. Everyone will be asked to put on their nametags that are sitting on top of their desks.

4. I then ask the students to take out a sheet of paper. Many start complaining that they were required to put it under their desk. I tell them that they are correct and ask them to get in line to get a sheet of paper for today's notes. The last few students in line, typically only receive a half of a sheet of a paper. After everyone has a sheet of paper, I ask the students to take the following overhead notes. The immediately start complaining that they do not have anything to write with. I tell them to stand up, and get in line for a pencil. During this entire time, I am making mental notes and the tape recorder is recording their reactions. The students get in line for a pencil, and then return to their seats. I continue with the instructions until one student complains that the pencils are not sharpened. I then instruct the students to get in line to sharpen their pencils. This is when the most commotion and complaints are heard. You will have students sharpen pencils for each other; you will have students try to use something else to avoid waiting in line, etc. Finally, after the students have a sheet of paper, and a sharpened pencil and is seated, I start to write the many complaints that I heard from the moment they were locked out of the room to the last sharpening of the pencils. I use the portions of the recorded tape for additional information.

5. I then tell the students that they have waited in line for approximately 20 minutes total. I show them the comments on the board, and play back a few more from the tape recording. This is their reaction from 20 minutes of standing in line. That is approximately 1/3 of the amount of time that the average Russian stood in line for a loaf of bread. This is during Soviet times and after the break-up

of the Soviet Union. This is referred to as "queuing-up."

6. I ask them questions relating to the simulation:

- What did you have to stand in line? (Government controlled the resources and final products.)
- Did everyone receive exactly what he or she needed? (No, there was also a problem of scarcity.)
- What were ways that you dealt with having to queue-up? (Offering to wait in line for someone for a price; Sharpening both ends of your pencil so that you would have two; Attempting to use the side of your desk or teeth to sharpen your own pencil.)

7. The questions lead into a short lecture on education, job training and placement, scarcity, family life, living conditions, and other characteristics unique to Command Economies. I have taken this material from a variety of resources. One of the most up-to-date and thorough is the Close-Up publication, Current Events. Newsweek has educational material on the Former Soviet Union. I have also used a current article of Command Economies for my IB students, since they are required to analyze articles for part of their Internal Assessments.

8. After the notes and/or discussion, the class is divided into groups of three or four students each. Each group will be asked to write a five-sentence paragraph about a high-school student living in the United States. Each group needs to address: education, family life, future goals, employment, and everyday life. (An example paragraph is attached at the end).

9. Each group would then pass the paragraphs to another group and that group would be responsible for translating the story about the "average American" into what that individual's life would be like if he or she lived in a Command Economy, such as the Former Soviet Union or North Korea. Each group must address the above issues.

10. Each group would then pass the translated story to a third group and that group would be responsible for evaluating what was written. Is it accurate? Did they address all the issues?

Homework:
Students will be asked to find an article in a newspaper or magazine about life in a different country. Using their background on Economic Systems, the students will write a short paragraph identifying the type of Economic System that is used in that country. Support from the article must be used.

Examples of the types of five-sentence paragraphs to be written by the student groups:

Round One:
Felicia Jones is 18 and lives in a suburb of Detroit. She is a senior in High School and wants to attend college next year to major in Math, so that she can eventually teach college. She works at the local movie theater in the concession stand. She owns her own can and lives at home with parents, and younger brother. She spends most of her time working, studying, playing Soccer and hanging out with friends at the mall.

Round Two:
Felicia Jones is 18 and lives in the city of Leningrad in the Soviet Union. She is in her thirteenth year of schooling. Three years ago she took an aptitude test that tracked her into the field of Engineering. She will continue with school for two more years and then move into an apprenticeship. There is currently a shortage of Electrical Engineers. She works at Dom Kneegeez (House of Books), shelving books. Since the government pays her schooling, any extra money she makes goes to help support her family. She lives in a small four-room apartment with her parents, two sisters, and maternal grandparents. She spends most of her time working and studying, since a lot of her extra time is taken up waiting in lines, and commuting to work on the bus or metro.

Round Three:
Each group evaluates the previous group's translation of the paragraph.